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# Far Eastern Fox Lore

ALEXANDER H. KRAPPE

THE VAST AMOUNT of folklore which clusters around the figure of Reynard the Fox in all countries of Europe, including Russia, and of the Near and Middle East is generally well known, although a complete index of fox stories and fox superstitions is still a desideratum. Much less known—for obvious reasons—is the fact that the fox is quite as prominent in fable and story of the Far East, though most of the tales current about him in China and Japan differ fundamentally from those told in medieval Europe and their derivatives. The amount of Far Eastern folklore material now available in Western languages is still relatively small, and no study of the subject may therefore lay claim to anything like completeness. Still, a beginning has to be made some time, in the hope that the facts brought to light will stimulate further research, particularly among scholars more favorably situated, from this point of view, than the writer.<sup>1</sup> The following pages have no other objective.

Let us begin our survey with the outlines of some characteristic fox stories from Far Eastern countries.

A1. A man marries a girl with whom he has fallen in love. During the first three years all goes well. Then the husband notices that the wife is always going to bed with her clothes on. One night, as she is asleep, he undresses her but to his horror and dismay discovers a fox tail three feet long. Naturally, he seeks safety in flight and forgets to return home.<sup>2</sup>

A2. Two farmers jokingly threaten to kindle a fire and to smoke the foxes out of a certain cavern in which they had made their home.<sup>3</sup> Both are promptly possessed by fox demons, one of whom imitates the voice of the farmer's deceased father and demands that the farmer's wife prepare a fine chicken for him. Both fox spirits are

<sup>1</sup> The only systematic study on Chinese fox lore now in print seems to be T. Watters, "Chinese Fox-Myths," in *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, N. S., VIII (1874), 45-65. For a briefer summary cf. M. W. de Visser, *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, XXXVI (1909) (3), 2-11. For some additional data cf. Henri Doré, *Recherches sur les superstitions en Chine*, II (Chang-Hai, 1912), 461 ff. On Japanese fox lore cf. de Visser, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-159. C. Meiners, *Allgemeine kritische Geschichte der Religionen*, Hanover, 1806-1807, II, 115.

<sup>2</sup> Watters, *op. cit.*, p. 61; cf. *Revue des traditions populaires*, I (1886), 296. It is worth noting that the hero's experience with his fox wife is not always so disappointing. Thus in a story from Yü Pao's *Sheu shen ki* (early fourth century A.D.) he ingenuously confesses that the pleasures he enjoyed with his fair partner were incomparably delightful; cf. J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious Systems of China* (Leyden, 1892-1910), IV, 188.

<sup>3</sup> The smoking-out of foxes seems to have been a common practice in China, so much so that the Code of Laws of the Ming and Ts'ing dynasties forbids damaging graves by smoking foxes out of them. Cf. de Groot, V, 600.

in the end driven out by a sturdy peasant lad armed with a knife who utters dire threats against them. [Shantung.]<sup>4</sup>

A3. A farmer steals the elixir of life from a fox and keeps it for thirty years, being able, after he has swallowed it, to see ghosts and devils, to communicate with the spirit world, to bring people in a fainting spell back to consciousness, to relieve sinners of their burden of guilt, in short, to act as a spiritual adviser, exorcist, and medicine man. Needless to add that he thus becomes a very rich man. After thirty years, having one day drunk more than is good for him, he is taken with a vomiting spell. All of a sudden a stranger taps him in the back, and he throws up the elixir in the form of a fiery ball. The stranger at once seizes it, saying: "For thirty years I have let you keep my treasure, and you have become a wealthy man; now I wish to have it back." With these words the fox disappears.<sup>5</sup>

In another Chinese story the fox is in possession of the philosopher's stone by means of which base metals may be converted into silver. He is willing enough to let a friend benefit from it but insists upon the latter spending freely the wealth thus acquired instead of hoarding it.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere the fox friend (who always appears in human shape) gives his human friend useful "tips" on where to find treasure trove or how profitably to invest his money.<sup>7</sup>

With the help of the elixir of life the fox is able to assume any shape he pleases; but he runs a risk of being killed by lightning when in the act of manufacturing the elixir. To ward off lightning, he uses a piece of cloth cut from the petticoat of a woman who wore it during the period of her impurity. A story relates how a hunter helps the lightning dragon, thus kept at a distance by the sly fox, by killing the animal.<sup>8</sup>

A4. A fox has set up his abode in a huge stack of straw near a farm house and frequently shows himself to the master of the house in the form of an old man. One day he invites the master to his lodgings and offers him hospitality in most luxurious apartments; but when the entertainment is over, the rooms appear stripped bare. One night the fox takes the master with him on a nightly expedition to a far-off region, where they partake of a feast in a fashionable restaurant or club house, to all appearances invisible to the guests. The fox helps himself and his friend to the fine dishes but informs the latter that one man is immune from his depredations because he is thoroughly upright. The master thereupon forms a resolution to sever his relations with the fox and to become upright himself. Immediately he falls from the gallery, to which the fox had led him and which turns out to be only a large beam, upon the revelers below. He relates his story, and they take up a collection to pay his traveling expenses; for he was a thousand *li* from his home.<sup>9</sup>

A5. A poor farmer pursued by hard luck strikes up an acquaintance with a fox

<sup>4</sup> R. Wilhelm, *Chinesische Volksmärchen* (Jena, 1921), pp. 170 ff., No. 56.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173 f. The elixir referred to in this tale seems to be related to the mysterious pearl the fox is said to possess, which will confer upon the man lucky enough to get hold of it the advantage of becoming a favorite of the whole world; cf. de Groot, V, 593 f.

<sup>6</sup> E. T. C. Werner, *Myths and Legends of China* (London, 1924), pp. 381 ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 379 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Wilhelm, pp. 174 ff., No. 58.

<sup>9</sup> Werner, pp. 371 f.

girl who tries to help him; but the silver she brings him, by virtue of his hard luck, turns into pewter. Finally she gives him some silver to buy himself a wife. As he had repeatedly expressed his wish to obtain a wife of surpassing beauty, she assures him that his wish will be fulfilled; but his wife turns out to be the very opposite of a matchless beauty, and he has to console himself with the fox girl's dictum, that marriages are made in the moon, i.e., ordained by Fate, and that mortals have nothing to do with them.<sup>10</sup>

Foxes may become attached to households and families; but there are good foxes and bad ones. Thus a story (A6) relates how a good fox benefits the family to which he has attached himself, increasing its wealth, because the master of the house has erected an altar to the fox god, at which he offers chickens and wine as well as incense. But another family is plagued by a fox of the opposite type, who acts very much as a mischievous hobgoblin in European tales and finally reduces the family to poverty.<sup>11</sup>

A7. Three thieves rob the imperial temple at Mukden of the sacred vessels of precious metal. As they climb the wall to escape with their plunder, an old man with a white beard, sitting on the roof of the temple, stops them with a gesture of his hand, and they are forced to remain sitting on the wall, where they are discovered and arrested the following morning. The matter having been reported to Peking, the Government decreed that a cult was to be established in honor of the fox god Hu—for he had been the venerable old man. [Manchuria.]<sup>12</sup>

The appearance of the fox spirit in the form of a venerable old man is found in China proper. Thus there was said to be at the Viceroy's yamên at Foochow a clay image of such an old man seated in a chair and representing the fox genius.<sup>13</sup>

A8. A fox in human shape approaches a farmer, who is, however, aware of his identity and puts him to flight with his ox whip. Some time later a woman becomes possessed by a fox spirit. The farmer is called and puts in his appearance armed with his whip. The fox does not wish to make its acquaintance a second time and promptly leaves his victim. [Shantung.]<sup>14</sup>

A9. Two fox sisters, transformed into beautiful girls, charm a young student and help him while away the hours not given to study. The affair takes a turn for the worse when a man from a distant province appears on the scene and reveals their true identity, as they have killed a brother of his. With the permission of the student's parents, who do not fancy their son's company, the stranger exorcises the fox maidens, forcing them to pass into two bottles in the form of thin threads of smoke. The student releases the younger and fairer of the two sisters, who disappears in the clouds, where she attains immortality. She appears to him thirty

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 372 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Wilhelm, pp. 176 ff., No. 59.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179 ff., No. 60. It is worth noting that in Manchuria meeting a black fox augurs the approach of universal peace and prosperity; cf. Watters, p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> Wilhelm, pp. 181 ff., No. 61.

years later to announce his impending death, advising him to put his affairs in order and adding that he need fear nothing, as she will see him safely into the other world. [*Laio Chai Chih I* (beginning of the eighteenth century)].<sup>15</sup>

Not unnaturally, fox maidens do not relish the thought of having their identity revealed by some intruder, and there are other stories which bring out this feature.<sup>16</sup>

A10. A gentleman engaged a private tutor for his children. The tutor proved satisfactory enough, in spite of some strange habits of his: he used to go out, for example, every day toward sunset. After a lapse of a few years he asked for the hand of his employer's daughter in marriage and was refused. He then tormented the household by elfish tricks but was beaten in the end and came to terms with the father.<sup>17</sup>

A11. A well-known scholar and teacher suddenly disappeared from his place of residence and could not be found or heard from for a long time, until at last, on a certain night, some of his old pupils, going to the top of a hill, found a class of foxes listening to a lecture by one of their species on the top of an ancient tomb. At the sight of human beings all ran away save the lecturer who was recognized by the men as their long-lost white-headed teacher.<sup>18</sup>

To these tales a certain number of the common "werewolf" type might be added: by means of a cloak of coarse wool, which has also the common properties of the German *Tarnkappe*, a man may transform himself into a fox. One of these stories, the scene of which is the city of Nanking, is found in the *Liao Chai Chih I* referred to above.<sup>19</sup>

Fox stories of this general type are also found among the Aino, as will be seen from the following specimens.

B1. A man overhears two foxes who come to an understanding by virtue of which one of them is to transform himself into a man, the other into a horse; the former is then to sell the latter, and the purchase price is to be divided between them after the one has helped the other to make his escape. The man passes himself off for the former of the two foxes and sells the second as a fine horse, but conveniently forgets all about helping him to escape from the purchaser's stable. The fox manages all the same to recover his liberty and is not slow in discovering the prank that has been played upon him. Both foxes accordingly decide to kill the man, who thinks it wise, however, to confess his fault and to propitiate them with rice-beer and fish. He also promises to establish a cult for them and to worship them for ever. The foxes agree to this, and that is why all men, both Aino and Japanese, worship the fox.<sup>20</sup>

B2. Two brother foxes decide to assume human shape and to sell all sorts of counterfeit articles of clothing and food. Their attempt is foiled by the Mole, who

<sup>15</sup> John C. Ferguson, *Chinese Mythology* (Boston, 1928), pp. 156 ff.

<sup>16</sup> W. Eberhard, *Typen chinesischer Volksmärchen* (Helsinki, 1937), p. 214, No. 162; Werner, pp. 376 ff.; de Groot, IV, 192.

<sup>17</sup> Watters, p. 59.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; de Groot, IV, 135.

<sup>19</sup> C. C. Stuhlmann, *Globus*, XXIX (1876), 59.

<sup>20</sup> B. H. Chamberlain, *Aino Folk-Tales* (London, 1888), pp. 10 ff.

gives human shape to crows, assuming himself the form of an old man. The trick of the foxes proves successful enough the first time; but on a second visit the Mole makes himself known, reveals to them what he has done to deceive them, and extracts from them a promise to cease assuming human shape and to content themselves with mulberries and grapes. Ever since, the foxes have left off appearing in the form of men and women and are satisfied with mulberries and grapes.<sup>21</sup>

B3. A fox spirit falls in love with a maiden and enters her womb, from which he cries out, warning all husbands she marries in succession not to meddle with her, whereupon they not unnaturally seek safety in flight. The girl is informed of this in a dream: her father exorcises the fox by carving an exact likeness of his daughter and offering it to the fox with respectful worship. Then she marries, has children, and lives happy ever after.<sup>22</sup>

In a Buryat tale from Eastern Siberia we find the role of the fox played by a wolf:<sup>23</sup>

A hungry wolf prays to God and is assigned a fat sheep belonging to a rich herdsman in the neighborhood. The owner, who is a wizard, has some premonition of what is going to befall the sheep and accordingly puts it in safety from the wolf. Thus foiled, the latter again turns to the deity, who this time assigns to him a mare of the same owner. Again, the latter, having some fore-knowledge, puts the mare in safety. The third time the wolf is assigned three cows, the property of the same rich man; but a third time the wolf is foiled. Shortly after, the rich man is befallen by a sudden and quite unexplainable fright. He decides to drive off to a wedding party to seek distraction and, should it be necessary to have the protection of the guests at the party. So he drives off in his carriage drawn by three fine horses. On the road he sees a lovely girl walking on foot. He stops to inquire whither she is bound and is told that she is returning from a cousin's wedding. Having fallen from her horse (which has made off without her), she is now going to the other wedding party, where she expects to meet her father. The rich man gallantly invites her to take a seat in the carriage, and she hastens to accept this invitation. When the carriage arrives at the place of the wedding and the doors are thrown open, lo and behold, out leaps a wolf. Inside the carriage only the bones of the victim are found.

C1. A striking analogue of this tale is found in Japan. Many years ago the country was ravaged by a wolf, who was a terror to the peasants. All of a sudden he disappeared; but the wayfarers would see in the evenings a pretty girl with a lantern, sitting on the highway on the edge of the forest. As roses were painted on the glass of the lantern, the girl soon became known as the Belle with the Rose Lantern; but those who followed her into the forest never returned: they became the prey of the wolf, who had assumed the shape of a girl to beguile the travelers.<sup>24</sup>

At all events, fox stories are widely known in Japan. According to the "Annals of the Empire," under the year 1150 of the Christian era, the finances

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14 ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47 f.

<sup>23</sup> C. F. Coxwell, *Siberian and Other Folk-Tales* (London, 1925), pp. 154 ff.

<sup>24</sup> Aimé Humbert, *Le Japon illustré* (Paris, 1870), II, 57. That the role of the wolf in these variants is clearly secondary is shown by the fact that Chinese folklore is familiar with nine-tailed foxes which devour men; cf. de Visser, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

of the empire were in a lamentable state, so much so that the Mikado was obliged, in order to balance his budget, to send away his favorite mistress. The poor girl accordingly left the imperial palace, but in the shape of a white fox with six tails spread out in the form of a fan.<sup>25</sup>

In this story the fair companion of His Imperial Majesty appears as the innocent victim of an economic depression. There is, however, another version showing her in a less favorable light. We refer to the tale of the fox witch known as Tamamo-no-Maya, a court lady reported to have lived in the twelfth century. This fair sharer of the ruler's burdens was in reality a very old fox with an eight-forked tail, who would turn herself into a fair charmer to play, at the Mikado's court, the roles of Mesdames de Pompadour and Dubarry. Having succeeded wonderfully in this art in India and China, she tried her luck in Japan, whither she flew through the air. Fortunately, her secret was discovered by a Japanese Choiseul, who finally broke her spell by the miraculous power of a divine mirror. On seeing herself in this mirror, the fox witch lost her power of transformation; she appeared in all her dreadful hideousness and flew away eastward, pursued and finally killed by an army powerfully aided by a supernatural host which issued from the mirror. Her evil spirit entered a rock near Nasu, as a result of which any living being that touched this "death stone" was instantly killed. A virtuous monk in the end exorcised the evil spirit, and the rock became harmless.<sup>26</sup>

That this story did not originate in Japan may be inferred from a Chinese parallel attached to the name of an eighth-century monarch, the emperor Yiu of the Western Chen dynasty. This good emperor was ruined by the wiles of his mistress, Pao Sz', who was, however, no woman at all but a three-tailed fox, as became clear when, on accomplishing her evil designs, she ran away and entered an old grave. Not content with the mischief she had wrought already, she would assume the shape of a fair charmer in order to bewitch men, in which enterprises she proved only too successful.<sup>27</sup> As a matter of fact, the Japanese Tamamo-no-Maya was said to have been a mere reincarnation of Pao Sz'.<sup>28</sup> The story was so popular in Japan that in the fifteenth century it was dramatized.<sup>29</sup>

C2. A Japanese *Voltaire* at a teaparty ventured to air his shallow skepticism with reference to the truth of certain fox stories which had been told by other members of the party. On his way home—the story does not tell whether tea had been

<sup>25</sup> H. Gamilly, *La Tradition*, I (1887), 170.

<sup>26</sup> Chamberlain, *The Classical Poetry of the Japanese* (London, 1880), pp. 147–156; cf. Masaharu Anesaki, *Japanese Mythology* (Boston, 1928), p. 325. It is worth pointing out that, in stories going back to the eighteenth century, cats will sometimes assume the shape of fair girls to ingratiate themselves with feudal nobles and ruin their estates; cf. Anesaki, p. 327; Watters, p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> De Visser, p. 43.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

the only drink partaken of—he beheld a fox running in front of him. A moment later a fair young girl of his circle of acquaintances met him; in reality it was not a girl at all but the fox who had taken this form. He followed her, though quite aware of her true identity, to the house of her parents, where he took it upon himself to warn the good people. The girl's mother was naturally quite indignant at the thought that her daughter should be a vixen. Without paying the slightest attention to her protests, he went to work and beat the girl mercilessly,<sup>30</sup> with a view to compelling her to resume her fox shape, and finally killed her. The neighbors and the police were called in, and the slayer found himself in a tight spot when, luckily for him, a priest who happened to pass by, attracted by the uproar, intervened in his behalf, on condition that he promised to take holy orders. To this he assented readily enough as to a minor evil. Just then a burst of laughter struck his ears; he opened his eyes and found himself in the wood where the fox had first seen him. He would have taken it all for a dream, had not the tonsure on his head convinced him of the sad reality. Too late he realized that it is not well to provoke the enmity of the foxes by expressing doubts about their powers. Filled with shame, our *Voltaireien* admitted his fault and became a monk.<sup>31</sup>

C3. A Japanese farmer, out of pure mischief, frightened a sleeping fox and chased it until it was almost exhausted, but did not kill it. The fox revenged itself by repeatedly appearing to the farmer in a dream, telling him that a treasure lay buried in his yard. Of course, the farmer was fooled, and his careful search produced nothing.<sup>32</sup>

In another Japanese tale (C4) going back to the eleventh century, the fox transforms himself into a cryptomeria tree. Arrows shot into the tree cause it to disappear. In its place a dead fox is found with a few twigs of cryptomeria in its mouth.<sup>33</sup>

C5. Prince Yashima of the princely family of the Abe protects a young fox from two court officials, who wish to catch it in order to prepare a medicine from its lungs. Since Yashima declines to deliver up the fox, a quarrel ensues, in the course of which Yashima's father, who has meanwhile joined his son, is slain. Yashima kills the two aggressors but returns home sad, mourning the loss of his father. When still in this mood, he meets a very beautiful girl, who tries to console him. As she is as intelligent as she is beautiful, the prince becomes enamored of her and marries her. After having given birth to a son, Yashima's wife reveals to her husband that she is none other than the fox whom he had protected. Out of gratitude she had shown herself to him in the shape of a girl; but now she must resume her existence as a fox and must leave him. Her son remains with his father; he becomes a wise man and a teacher of his people.<sup>34</sup>

C6. Somewhat less satisfactory was the experience of a Japanese husband of a fox woman. Though beautiful and generally lovable, she did not succeed in win-

<sup>30</sup> It not infrequently happens that the victims of fox possession are cruelly treated by their friends and relatives, being severely burned, beaten, or otherwise mistreated, in the hope that the fox may thus be driven away; cf. L. Hearn, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (London, 1894), I, 324.

<sup>31</sup> Gamilly, *op. cit.*, p. 171; D. Brauns, *Japanische Märchen und Sagen* (Leipzig, 1885), pp. 371 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Anesaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 325 f.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 326 f.; de Visser, p. 29.

<sup>34</sup> Brauns, *op. cit.*, pp. 388 ff.



ning the good graces of a puppy that was kept in the house. One day the dog feigned to attack her, and the frightened woman changed into a fox, climbed on the fence, and sat there, while her bewildered husband, looking at his transformed wife, exclaimed: "Between you and me a child has been born; therefore I can't forget you. Come always and sleep with me." She complied with this request.<sup>35</sup> It is a story of this general type, which in Japan antedates the tenth century, that seems to have suggested to R. A. Garnett the theme of his novel, *Lady into Fox* (1923).

These fox ladies are so wily that even holy men are made by them to stray from the path of virtue. A story from the *Shimpen otogirōshi*, a work which goes back to the Muromachi period (1378-1601), relates the following tale:

C7. A Buddhist priest is induced by a love letter to follow the invitation of a lady and taken to a sumptuous palace, where he spends (as he thinks) months and years feasting and drinking. All of a sudden a noise is heard at the gate, and three or four sturdy Buddhist priests come in carrying crosiers. The fair charmer and her attendants and servants flee in great alarm, and the astonished priest sees them all change into foxes and scamper off in all directions.<sup>36</sup>

Very peculiar is the notion, attested as early as the eleventh century, that intercourse with a fox woman means death to the man, unless the woman is willing to die in his place. A story localized in Kyoto indicates that there was an occasional *dame aux camélias* even among the Japanese fox ladies.<sup>37</sup>

The Chinese tale outlined above (A4) has close parallels in Japan. Suffice it to quote a specimen going back to the eleventh century:<sup>38</sup>

C8. A maid servant received a message from her master ordering her to come to a certain house which he had rented. She hurried there with her child, was well entertained by her mistress, and after four or five days sent back to the main house. She left her child there as she was soon to return. When she reached the main house she found to her astonishment the very company she had just left in the newly rented house. They asked her where she had been all this time and naturally refused to believe her story. She hurried back to the mysterious house to fetch her child; but she found it crying helplessly in a lonely heath: the house had disappeared. It was assumed that she had been deluded by foxes.

In another tale of this general type, which goes back to the twelfth century, foxes deceive a Buddhist bishop by offering him a sumptuous banquet. As a pious man, he did not sit down without saying his prayers. As he struck the prayer bell the lights suddenly turned red, and the food in the dishes was found to be dung. The next day the house had disappeared and no trace of it was left.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> De Visser, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 99.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34; cf. also pp. 70 and 88.

The alarm felt by the parents of the Chinese student of the story Ag at the intelligence they receive of their son's intimacy with fox maidens is sufficiently explained by the Japanese notion just referred to: that intercourse with such creatures means death to the imprudent mortal. Additional light is thrown on this subject by an entry in the *Taiki*, the diary of Fujiwara no Yorinaga (1120-1156). It relates the story of a boy of sixteen years who, in 1144, in the very precincts of the imperial palace, was seduced by a fox in the shape of a young woman and caught a bad venereal disease.<sup>40</sup> It is to be suspected that the vixen in question was one in the metaphorical sense only, a conclusion corroborated by a similar though much more recent tale, according to which, in the Kwansei era, which roughly coincides with the French Revolution, a *tanuki* ("badger") had taken the shape of a woman and stood night after night on the crossroads at a mountain inn, in order to seduce men.<sup>41</sup>

Let us add that the notion of the fox assuming the shape of a venerable scholar, as exemplified in the Chinese variant A11, is found also in Japan.<sup>42</sup>

Like many other Far Eastern folklore themes, the tale of the fox wife has crossed the Bering Strait at an unknown period and is now found among the Eskimos of the New World. A story from Labrador reads as follows:<sup>43</sup>

A hunter, to his pleasant surprise, repeatedly finds, on returning home, that some one has taken care of his wet clothes, prepared a good meal, in short, has exerted himself or herself to make life agreeable to him. Desiring to know his unknown benefactor, he hides somewhere near the hut and has the satisfaction of seeing a fox slip in. Naturally, he at first thinks that the animal is merely on the prowl for food; but on approaching the door of his hut he sees to his amazement a pretty girl busy in the house, while a fox hide is hanging on the line. To his question the fox girl candidly admits that it is she who has kept his house in order, and expresses her contentment with the idea of being his wife. Everything seems to be in a fine way when the man one day has the poor taste to complain of a musky odor about the house. Immediately the wife dons her fox hide and disappears, never to be seen again.

To these fox stories, the number of which could be greatly increased, many superstitions connected with the fox must be added. In China it generally forebodes ill luck to encounter a fox, a fear attested as early as the Chou dynasty (about 1100 B.C.). One of the odes of Shih-ching expresses summarily the ruin and misery of the country by saying that nothing red was to be seen except the fox, and nothing black except the crow.<sup>44</sup> The entrance of a fox into

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>43</sup> Stith Thompson, *Tales of the North American Indians* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), pp. 161 f.; Paul Sock, *Eskimomärchen* (Berlin, s.d.), pp. 136 f. In a variant it is the husband's jealous cousin who inopportunely brings up the delicate subject of the fox's smell; cf. H. Rink, *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo* (Edinburgh, 1875), p. 143.

<sup>44</sup> Watters, p. 47; de Groot, V, 576-600. For a similar symbolism in the Near East cf. V. Chauvin, *Bibliographie*, II, 153, VIII, 129 f.; Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index*, J 816.1.

a house presages bad luck.<sup>45</sup> A fox spirit may "possess" a man or a woman, a belief equally known in Japan (see story C2 above).<sup>46</sup> A man pursued by ill luck is said to be haunted by the fox (Hu-li-ma). Quite logically the *Hu-li-ma* is employed to quiet obstreperous children.<sup>47</sup> Upon the whole, however, the fox does not like hearing the sound of his name or seeing the character expressing this name, for which reason circumlocutions are used both in speech and in writing.<sup>48</sup> In the Foochow district, therefore, they refer to the fox simply as *Teong-wei*, "long-tail."<sup>49</sup> The fox may produce fire by striking the ground with his tail—a belief found also in Japan<sup>50</sup>—and he is commonly held to set fire to the houses of people for whom he bears a grudge.<sup>51</sup> Conversely, being able to produce fire, the fox may also protect houses from fire.<sup>52</sup> The *ignis fatui* or will o' the wisp is commonly referred to as "fox fire."<sup>53</sup> Its customary abode is among tombs in cemeteries. That is why the spirits of the dead often take possession of a fox in order to return to the world of the living and to settle old scores.<sup>54</sup> Thus, in a Chinese story outlined by Watters (*op. cit.*, p. 60), a mistreated wife, after her death, haunts the house of her husband, so that no servant will remain in the family. In doing this she assumes the shape of a spectral woman inside the house, that of a fox outside.

Living persons possessed by the fox elf show a strange type of madness. They run naked and shouting through the streets or lie down with froth issuing from their mouths, yelping like a fox. They are also known to speak and write languages, of which, in a normal condition, they are quite ignorant. They eat only what foxes are believed to like, and they eat a great deal, alleging that not they but the possessing foxes are hungry.<sup>55</sup>

Conversely, the fox may become the recipient of a man's soul, even during the latter's lifetime. In that event, the animal becomes a sort of guardian angel, watching over the man and averting hurtful accidents.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Meeting a fox is an ill omen in many countries of the Near East, Africa, and the Occident; cf. J. Scheffelowitz, *Zeitschrift d. Vereins f. Volkskunde*, XXIII (1913), 384; *Alt-Palästinensischer Bauernglaube* (Hanover, 1925), p. 141; L. Hopf, *Thierorakel und Orakelthiere in alter und neuer Zeit* (Stuttgart, 1888), pp. 39, 43, 62.

<sup>46</sup> De Visser, pp. 86, 125 f. A number of the phenomena related must clearly be put in the large class of spiritualist phenomena; cf., *ibid.*, pp. 45, 47 (pelting), 95, 97.

<sup>47</sup> Watters, p. 57.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54. For similar "taboo" names of the fox in the West cf. J. Acerbi, *Travels through Sweden and Lapland to the North Cape in the Years 1798 and 1799*, I (London, 1802), 180; J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, II, 556, n. 2; R. Riegler, *Wörter und Sachen*, IV (1912), 176; *Archivum Romanicum*, XVII (1933), 405-409; M. L. Wagner, *ibid.*, XVI (1932), 501-514.

<sup>50</sup> De Visser, pp. 100 and 104; de Groot, IV, 182 and 194.

<sup>51</sup> De Groot, V, 595 f., 598; de Visser, p. 38.

<sup>52</sup> De Visser, p. 37.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>54</sup> Watters, p. 58.

<sup>55</sup> De Groot, V, 578; Hearn, *op. cit.*, I, 324.

<sup>56</sup> Watters, p. 57.

The ghosts of murdered people often take the shape of a fox, setting fire to the houses of their enemies,<sup>57</sup> striking their children with disease, and often driving to suicide the parties thus persecuted.<sup>58</sup> For all these reasons the fox is thoroughly feared, and this fear has given rise to a regular fox cult both in China and Japan. We have seen in several stories given above that the fox is propitiated with the promise of a regular cult. In China the fox is worshiped largely for the purpose of keeping him away from the household, seldom or never with the hope of obtaining anything good. This fox cult is very old: historical evidence points to its existence as early as the T'ang dynasty, which reigned from 618 to 907 of the Christian era. The fox elf was even then propitiated with offerings of food and drink. Its cult was widespread, and it was a common saying among the people that one could not find an inch of ground without that elf.<sup>59</sup>

As a sort of hobgoblin the fox attaches himself to certain Japanese households and certain families. He becomes, in fact, part of the household and the family, so much so that, like the European hobgoblin, he cannot be shaken off. But if the daughter of that household marries, the fox not only follows the bride but also haunts the families related by marriage or kinship with the husband's family. Since every fox is supposed to have a family of seventy-five, all of which must be fed with offerings, it is clear that having family foxes is quite a luxury, difficult for any poor man.

Such foxes frequently contribute to the prosperity of the family to which they are attached, but the money and grain they bring are simply stolen from other houses and farms.<sup>60</sup> It is thus very immoral to keep foxes. Nor are they as reliable as could be wished. They are tale-bearers and, besides, they are easily offended and vindictive. No wonder that fox-possessing families are shunned and that intermarriage with such a family is out of the question. Since the center of the Japanese fox superstition is the province of Izumo, girls from that region do not like to marry outsiders. The daughters of a fox-possessing family are virtually compelled to marry into another such family. This aspect of the fox superstition appears to be unknown in China and is a typically Japanese development,<sup>61</sup> though story A6 clearly shows that it rests on a basis quite familiar to the Chinese.

Like most things terrestrial, this superstition has also its bright side: certain fox-possessing families are held in awe, since it would obviously be an easy thing for them to send their foxes to plague obstreperous neighbors. Hence, in their communities they have things pretty much their own way.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56 and 58.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53 ff.

<sup>60</sup> De Visser, p. 125. On this aspect of the fox superstition cf., *ibid.*, pp. 50, 99, 105 ff.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

Since foxes are attached to the land quite as much as to the family dwelling upon it—in feudal Japan this was very much the same thing anyway—it is easy to see how the superstition affects real estate values: the land of a family supposed to have foxes cannot be sold at a fair price. People are afraid to buy it. This is especially true of land terraced for rice fields, since the foxes are believed to play ruinous pranks with the irrigation system.<sup>62</sup>

Fortunately, the pranks of the fox elf are not always of a dangerous character; often it merely plagues the individual it haunts by carrying off his cap, mislaying his books, spilling his tea, or by other antics commonly ascribed, in Europe, to the hobgoblin.<sup>63</sup> One of the Chinese stories outlined above (A<sub>4</sub>) has striking parallels in Western Europe. In this story a mortal follows the fairies into the wine cellar of a lord, at a considerable distance from his home, and is discovered by the butler on the following morning.<sup>64</sup>

One Japanese tale (C<sub>5</sub>), as we have seen, indicates the considerable role played by the fox in popular medicine. In fact, according to Chinese and Japanese beliefs all parts of the fox's body are useful; his blood is an antidote against drunkenness; his roasted flesh is a stomach stimulant; his entrails are a remedy for ulcers and the fever; his saliva is used in love potions, and so on.<sup>65</sup>

In Japan, the fox plays much the same role as the Latin *Lar* and the European house spirit, called *tomte* in Norway, *duende* in Spain, *Heinzelmann* in Germany, etc. Like these spirits, he lives in the houses of men and is fed by them. If offended, he may bring misfortune on the household and ruin the crops.<sup>66</sup> Known under the name of *Kitsué*, he is even the recipient of a public cult. In Yedo, for example, he has much the same functions as the Priapus of Lampsacus: he protects gardens and orchards, and a regular chapel is dedicated to him.<sup>67</sup> Nor is this fox cult restricted to any given locality. By every shady wayside, on almost every hilltop and in the outskirts of every village in the Hondu country little Shinto shrines are seen, with stone images of seated foxes around them. Most of these are quite small; but there are also some of colossal size. The temples in question are dedicated to Inari.<sup>68</sup>

Inari is also the name by which the fox is generally known in Japan; but Inari was also the goddess of rice, the great "rice mother," hence the Japanese equivalent of the ancient Demeter, the North European "corn mother," the

<sup>62</sup> Hearn, I, 324 ff.

<sup>63</sup> Watters, p. 45.

<sup>64</sup> Th. Wright, *Essays* (London, 1846), I, 285, II, 9 ff.; R. H. Barnham, *The Ingoldsby Legends* (London, 1901), I, 163 ff.; R. Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England* (London, 1865), I, 76 ff.; W. B. Yeats, *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* (New York, s.d.), pp. 92 and 180; Paul Sébillot, *Traditions et superstitions de la Haute-Bretagne* (Paris, 1882), II, 50.

<sup>65</sup> Watters, p. 49; de Visser, p. 100; *Revue des Traditions populaires*, I, 297.

<sup>66</sup> Hearn, I, 322.

<sup>67</sup> Gamilly, pp. 169 f.

<sup>68</sup> Hearn, I, 310.

Peruvian "mother of maize," and similar figures.<sup>69</sup> Thus the question arises: How are we to explain the connection of the animal with the goddess? There is evidence to show that as early as the eleventh century, the fox was considered a divine animal, protected by a powerful taboo.<sup>70</sup> True enough, in modern times the goddess never assumes vulpine shape, and the foxes are merely her messengers. On the other hand, we know that everywhere the theriomorphic divinities are the original ones and that, in the course of time, they shed their animal form to assume human shape. When that happens, the animal is reduced to the status of an attribute, favorite animal, or messenger of the divinity.<sup>71</sup> De Visser also pointed to the well-known European conception of the corn spirit appearing as a wolf, fox, dog, or the like.<sup>72</sup> More generally, a peculiar connection between certain cultivated plants and certain animal species is known also in the West and has been pointed out repeatedly.<sup>73</sup> Since the connection of the fox with rice seems to be unknown in China, we are again dealing with a peculiarly Japanese development. The conception of Inari as a male divinity is recent; it is only in modern art that Inari is represented as a bearded man riding on a white fox.<sup>74</sup>

As a spirit of food, Inari is logically a giver of wealth, a sort of male Fortuna. Hence it is that his foxes are sometimes shown with keys in their mouths. In the rear of many Inari temples a small round hole is found in the wall of the shrine building, in which offerings of food for foxes are placed. Rice is scattered near the hole, and peasants recite their prayers in front of it, swallowing a grain or two of the rice in the belief that it will either cure or prevent illness.<sup>75</sup>

The most common and most widespread of fox superstitions, both in China and Japan, is the one illustrated by a number of the fox stories outlined above, namely the ability of the fox to transform himself and to assume any shape he pleases. He may appear in the form of a horse or any other quadruped, in that of an old man of scholarly appearance, or in that of a pretty girl.<sup>76</sup> In Japan the wild fox (*Nogitsune*) not only may assume any shape, but may make himself altogether invisible to men, though not to dogs. That is why he is afraid of the dog. The peasants kill the wild fox, but its slayer incurs a risk of being bewitched by the fox's kindred or even by its *ki* or ghost. The favorite shape assumed by the wild fox is that of a pretty girl, and there are innumerable

<sup>69</sup> De Visser, pp. 129 ff.; W. Mannhardt, *Mythologische Forschungen* (Strassburg, 1884), pp. 202 ff.

<sup>70</sup> De Visser, p. 130.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>73</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, ed. Frazer (1929), II, 153; P. v. Bradke, *Ueber Methode und Ergebnisse der arischen Alterthumswissenschaft* (Giessen, 1890), p. 221; A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1879-1882), II, 64 f.; de Visser, *Die nicht-menschengestaltigen Götter der Griechen* (Leiden, 1903), p. 40; R. Eisler, *Vorträge d. Bibliothek Warburg*, II (2) (1925), 277, n. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Hearn, I, 312 ff.; A. Skrzynski, *Am Urquell*, VI (1896), 13 f.; D. Mohnike, *Globus*, XXI (1892), 332.

<sup>75</sup> Hearn, I, 322.

<sup>76</sup> *Revue des traditions populaires* I, 296.

stories about the wiles of these fox women. This explains also the Chinese name of the fox elf, *Niang-Niang*, "the Lady," and the fact that she is the patron saint, as it were, of the courtesans of Foochow and other places.<sup>77</sup>

Fortunately for society and the just equilibrium which is absolutely essential in this sublunar world, no matter what disguise the fox assumes and what artifices he resorts to, he is generally beaten in the end and forced to return to his brute condition. Sometimes it is his ignorance and sometimes his tail, sometimes merely the brightness of day, that will give him away. Once detected, he has no other recourse except to tuck his tail between his legs and to scamper off, a mere fox, to his native tomb or mound. Needless to say, there are professional exorcists, experts in the game of exposing the fox, whatever his disguise, and equally expert in extracting good money from their dupes.<sup>78</sup>

Quite naturally, the Chinese of relatively enlightened periods were as much puzzled by this queer role of Master Reynard as we are ourselves. To explain it, they were not slow in inventing an etiological story, which runs as follows.<sup>79</sup>

The fox was once a very beautiful woman, who unfortunately was not distinguished for the puritanical austerity of her morals. Her name was Tzu, and when the measure of her sins was full to overflowing, she was transformed into a fox, though for some unexplained reason she was left with the power to resume human shape when it suited her fancy. This is the reason why every fox woman, on being asked her name, answers Ah-tzu.

Surveying the material collected, we find that the superstition is distributed over an area extending from the shores of Lake Baikal eastward as far as Manchuria and Japan and southward as far as the Indo-Chinese frontier. It stands to reason that it must have started at some diffusion center, and it will be our task to discover the location of its source.

To begin with, all Japanese authorities are agreed on the fact that the fox cult and fox lore are not originally Japanese but are imports from China going back to the tenth century at the latest.<sup>80</sup> This conclusion is borne out not only by the close similarity (if not the outright identity), of the various types of fox lore in both countries, but also by the fact that in both the fox shares a good deal of this lore with the badger and the wildcat.<sup>81</sup> In fact, the common Chinese name for "fox," *hu-li*, is really a compound of two different roots, *hu* meaning "fox," and *li* "wildcat."<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Watters, p. 54.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>80</sup> Anesaki, p. 325.

<sup>81</sup> Watters, pp. 46 and 54. It is worth noting that in Japan the badger, too, is credited with the power of assuming the shape of a woman; cf. H. Kunike, *Mythologische Bibliothek*, VIII (4) (Leipzig, 1916), p. 34; Brauns, pp. 33 ff., 43 ff., 46 ff., 383; de Visser, pp. 70, 77.

<sup>82</sup> Watters, p. 46; A. B. Mitford, *Tales of Old Japan* (London, 1871), II, 71; Anesaki, p. 327.

At the present time these fox stories are known all over China, and they were thus known as early as the eighteenth century, as we know from statements in the *Liao Chai Chih I*.<sup>83</sup> The Chinese authors are furthermore agreed that these stories antedate the year 1000 of the Christian era, a conclusion confirmed, as we have seen, by the date of the Japanese fox stories and the existence of the cult of the fox elf in the reign of the T'ang dynasty. The Chinese authors also believe that the fox stories and the fox cult originated in the provinces of the northeast.<sup>84</sup> The correctness of this view is borne out by (1) the authenticity of the fox cult in Manchuria, (2) the diffusion of fox stories among the Aino, and (3) the Buryat tale from the Lake Baikal region. It would seem likely, therefore, that the fox cult and the various types of fox stories and fox superstitions were originally peculiar to a population inhabiting northeastern China, Manchuria, parts of Mongolia, and, perhaps, northern Japan; but it is not likely that this population is to be identified with the Aino, among whom fox stories, though known, are by no means very common and may be easily explained as cultural borrowings from a people on a considerably higher level of culture.

Let us now try to discover the origin of these strange beliefs and superstitions. Here it is well to bear in mind one fundamental fact: none of the story types or specimens of superstition is conditioned on the fox being the chief protagonist. In the Buryat tale and in one Japanese story (C<sub>1</sub>), as we have seen, this protagonist is a wolf. In Japan it is frequently a question, not of a fox, but of a wildcat. What is even more remarkable, the pranks attributed to the fox elf are for the most part the very ones which the European peasantry attribute to the hobgoblin. Again, animals who assume the shapes of fair charmers to beguile poor innocent males of the human species are by no means peculiar to the Far East, though, to be sure, outside of China and Japan the animal is generally not a fox.

Even in China, the protagonist of these stories is not necessarily a fox. Thus a story current in Chekiang, Chu-chi, reads as follows:<sup>85</sup>

A butcher, ambitious to become a saint (*Shêng-jên*), leaves his native town. On the road he meets two other men who had conceived a like ambition long before him and had to all appearances made some progress on the road to virtue. Thus they continue their journey together. The two traveling companions of our butcher soon succumb to the wiles of two girls of easy virtue, who are really two transformed snakes. The butcher, who has manfully resisted the temptation, realizes his ambition.

<sup>83</sup> Stuhlmann, *Globus*, XXIX (1876), 59.

<sup>84</sup> Eberhard, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

<sup>85</sup> Eberhard, p. 185, No. 126.



A story of a similar type is current in Japan and connected with the origin of the imperial dynasty.<sup>86</sup>

The hero Hohodemi marries the daughter of a sea-god called Toyotamahime and spends some time in her palace. Seized with homesickness, he returns to his own country, accompanied by his young wife, who shortly after gives birth to a son. She requests to be left absolutely alone during her delivery.<sup>87</sup> He gives her his solemn promise to comply with this reasonable request, but promptly breaks it. To his horror he beholds her crawling on the ground in the shape of a dragon. Justly indignant at his intrusion, she leaves him and returns to her father's kingdom, sending her sister to take care of her child, who in due course becomes the father of the first mikado.

As will have been noted, this story belongs to the type best known, in Western Europe, by the legend of the fair Melusina, the fairy ancestress of the Lusignan family. To be sure, in both stories, the Japanese and the European, the snake woman causes no harm to her husband and his family, and, all things considered, Henri Heine was quite right in observing that Raymondin de Lusignan was a relatively happy man, since his wife was only half a snake!

*Naga* maidens who marry mortals are well known in Indian folklore.<sup>88</sup> We subjoin the outline of one of the better-known tales belonging to this type:<sup>89</sup>

A king has unknowingly married a serpent in the form of a pretty girl. A yoghi reveals to him her true identity and proves his assertion to His Majesty's satisfaction. Upon the advice of the holy man the king orders a transportable oven to be constructed and to be set up in a corner of the palace garden. By a trick he then contrives to push his wife into this oven, closing the heavy iron door upon her. As the oven is red hot, the serpent struggles with might and main to get out but fails in the attempt and is burned to ashes.

If the fox in Chinese belief may assume all types of shapes, so can the serpent in India. Thus, in a Punjâbi story, a serpent successively transforms itself into a buffalo, an ox, and a beautiful girl, always with a view to bringing death and ruin upon the unwary.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>86</sup> *Nihongi*, II, 5, übers. v. Karl Florenz, *Mitt. d. dtsh. Gesellsch. f. Natur- u. Völkerkunde Ostasiens*, Suppl. IV (1901), pp. 223 f.; Brauns, *op. cit.*, p. 138; cf. A. Pfizmaier, *Denkschriften d. Wiener Akademie d. Wissensch., Phil.-hist. Cl. XV* (1867), pp. 46 f.

<sup>87</sup> On this widespread taboo cf. H. Schneider, *Die Gedichte und die Sage von Wolfdietrich* (Munich, 1913), p. 295; A. Dickson, *Valentine and Orson* (New York, 1929), p. 169; Dudley Kidd, *Savage Childhood* (London, 1906), p. 9.

<sup>88</sup> Sir James G. Scott, *Indo-Chinese Mythology* (Boston, 1918), p. 276; A. Bastian, *Die Völker des östlichen Asien* (Jena, 1866-1871), V, 125; Tawney-Penzer, *The Ocean of Story* (London, 1924-1928), VI, 73.

<sup>89</sup> F. A. Steel and R. C. Temple, *Wide-awake Stories* (Bombay, 1884), pp. 189 ff.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 219 ff.

An Armenian tale of the same type was taken down toward the middle of the last century:<sup>91</sup>

A hunter finds a beautiful girl in a mountain wilderness and takes her with him, as she avers having lost her way home. Subsequently she admits that her tale had been fiction: having fallen in love with him, she has had recourse to this stratagem to make his acquaintance and to win his love. As he has likewise become enamored of her, he promptly marries her. Unfortunately for the fair girl, her husband one day receives the visit of an Indian fakir who by means of an onxy, a stone which changes its color when brought into the proximity of any living being or object that has undergone a metamorphosis, recognizes in her a transformed snake and warns her husband accordingly. He advises him to make his wife thirsty by means of salty dishes, to cut off the water supply, and to lock the house upon her. In due time she is seen to extend her neck through the chimney, as far as the near-by river, from which she is heard to gulp down water. To get rid of her, the fakir advises the husband to burn her to ashes in an oven. This is done, whereupon the man of God collects the ashes, which have the power to transform base metals into gold.

The oldest known version in the Occident is found in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus (IV. 25), best known from John Keats's poem "Lamia" and from a delightful short story of André Theuriet entitled "Ophidna":<sup>92</sup>

The Lycian Menippus, a handsome youth with many accomplishments and a pupil of Apollonius of Tyana, who lived in the latter part of the first century of the Christian era, has been captivated by a strange woman who declares herself a Phoenician. Having met him on the road to Canchreae, she has taken him into her luxurious home in the suburbs of Corinth, where they set up a love idyll and lead a life such as is commonly attributed to the immortal gods.

Alas, the fair charmer has not reckoned with the stern teacher of her beloved, the sharp-sighted Apollonius from whom nothing is hidden and who reveals forthwith to the disappointed youth that his fair partner is a serpent. Needless to say that in his blissful existence Menippus is only too inclined to turn a deaf ear to these salutary warnings: more deeply in love than ever before, he has made up his mind to convert his *ménage* into a more permanent union.

Apollónius, intent on saving his heedless pupil from the wiles of the Evil One, presents himself at their wedding breakfast and there proves, to the consternation of the bridegroom and the assembled guests, that the lovely bride is only a vampire, i.e., one of those beings generally regarded as lamias and hobgoblins: they fall in love and indeed delight in the pleasures of Aphrodite; but they delight even more in the flesh of human beings, decoying with these pleasures those whom they mean to devour in their feasts.

The lady, not unnaturally, is minded to have the marplot thrown out of her house; but she has to deal with one stronger than herself; for the fine goblets and silverware, nay, the whole luxurious show, flutter away, and the wine-bearers,

<sup>91</sup> A. v. Haxthausen, *Transkaukasien* (Leipzig, 1856), I, 125; cf. M. Abeghian, *Der armenische Volksglaube* (Leipzig, 1899), p. 76.

<sup>92</sup> A. Theuriet, *Contes de la Marjolaine* (Paris, 1902), pp. 177 ff.

cooks, and other servants vanish before the rebukes of the irate philosopher. The phantom wife implores him not to torture her; but Apollonius insists on a full confession, and she reluctantly admits that she is a vampire and that she was fattening Menippus with pleasures before devouring his body.

The theme of the snake woman is thus known from China to France. The diffusion center can only be a country in which poisonous snakes are common and justly feared and in which, for some reason, they were currently believed to assume human shape, whether male or female. This country is India with its pre-Aryan *naga* cult and its vast number of *naga* stories. In fact, the Armenian tale outlined above still betrays its Indian origin by the detail that it is an Indian fakir who detects the serpentine nature of the hunter's fair partner.<sup>93</sup> The *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* is known to contain a number of Indian elements, which must probably be connected with the wonderworker's alleged stay in India. The European Melusina story does not antedate the Crusades; it is furthermore connected with a family, the Lusignans, which at one time sat on the throne of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Let us now see how these Indian *naga* stories are apt to be transformed when carried to China. A Buddhist tale translated from the Pali into Chinese sometime in the fifth century of our era reads as follows:<sup>94</sup>

At one time the Bodhisattva, born as a merchant, went on a commercial voyage with other merchants. At the port of their destination all were enticed by the charms of beautiful girls, so much so that they forgot all about their home and waiting kinsfolk. After five years the Bodhisattva was warned by a stranger, who informed him that those women were demons bound to devour them in due time. To test the truth of this warning he was to feign sleep. As he did so, he discovered that the girls were *foxes* of a ghoulish type. He promptly informed his comrades of what he had seen and induced them to have recourse to the same stratagem. Frightened to death by what they saw, they took to flight.

The Bodhisattva's fair partner, who meanwhile had become a mother, had recourse to tears and lamentations and when these proved of no avail, denounced him to the king. The Bodhisattva told his side of the story, and the king, upon whom the charms of the woman had made a deep effect, was only too glad to dismiss the case and to send the fair charmer into his own harem. There she promptly transformed herself into a *fox* and started devouring the king's loyal subjects, thus bringing his kingdom to the brink of ruin.

Had de Visser known this story he would doubtless have cited it in support of his contention that the evil character given the fox in folk tales is due to Indian and Buddhist influences.<sup>95</sup> Unfortunately for this theory, as an Indian tale this story would be the only known specimen in which the role of the

<sup>93</sup> Cf. also Steel-Temple, pp. 189 ff.

<sup>94</sup> E. Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues extraits du Tripitaka chinois*, I (Paris, 1910), pp. 122 ff.

<sup>95</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 151.

vampire woman is played by a fox. Furthermore, in China and Japan, the fox, while certainly an evil demon, rarely goes so far as to devour his victims. Whenever this happens (as in the Buryat and one Japanese variant cited above), the storytellers are careful to make the animal a wolf. It is therefore virtually certain that in the Pali original of our tale the demonic girls were not fox women. In view of the Indian *naga* superstition and the *naga* stories just reviewed we are probably justified in concluding that they were originally *nagas*. As this form of superstition was little known in China, the translator rendered the Pali word in question by "fox," and this in turn proves the antiquity of the fox superstition in China and the Far East in general.

All this does not throw as much light as could be wished on the origin and *raison d'être* of Far Eastern fox lore. Since the theme of the snake wife is clearly not European, one is naturally inclined to ask: What are the European pendants of the Far Eastern fox stories and fox superstitions? Inasmuch as the problem has never been presented for discussion, it may occur to some that there are no such pendants. Such a view would be highly erroneous: the Far Eastern fox lore is just as common and just as widespread in Europe as it is in East Asia, except that the part of the fox<sup>98</sup> is played by another carnivorous animal, the weasel.

Let us first turn to the names by which the weasel is known in the West. In Greece the name *nymphē*, "bride," modern Greek, *nymphitza*, is attested as early as the fourth century of the pre-Christian era.<sup>99</sup> In Italy it is still called *donnola*, "little lady," the exact equivalent of the Chinese *Niang-Niang*, "fox."<sup>100</sup> The Magyar *menyet* and the Slav *nevěstuca* (< *nevěsta*), "bride," may possibly be loan translations from the Greek; but it would be difficult to explain thus the name "fairy" given the weasel in the western counties of England.<sup>101</sup> The Jerusalem Talmud terms the weasel *ishuth*, "little woman."<sup>102</sup> Mention should also be made of the fact that in ancient Greek *galē*, "weasel," was used to denote a certain type of woman, very much as the term "vixen" is used in modern English.<sup>103</sup>

These facts clearly presuppose the existence, in Europe, of stories analogous to the Chinese and Japanese tales of the fox maiden, a conclusion borne out by a considerable number of metamorphosis tales. The best-known of these

<sup>98</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that "werefoxes," i.e., witches in fox form, are known also in Europe; cf. J. Jegerlehner, *Schweizerisches Archiv f. Volkskunde*, V (1901), 302; *Schweizer Volkskunde*, XIV (1924), 35; K. Wehrhan, *Die Sage* (Leipzig, 1908), p. 99.

<sup>99</sup> Th. Zielinski, *Rheinisches Museum f. Philologie*, XLIV (1889), 156 f.; Th. S. Duncan, *The Weasel in Religion, Myth and Superstition* (Washington University Studies, XII [1924-1925], 37).

<sup>100</sup> On weasel names cf. also H. Schuchardt, *Zeitschrift f. romanische Philologie*, XXXVI (1912), 160 ff.; E. Schott, *Das Wiesel in Sprache und Volksglauben der Romanen* (diss., Tübingen, 1935); cf. Riegler, *Archiv f. d. Studium d. neueren Spr. u. Lit.*, CLXVIII (1935), 113-115.

<sup>101</sup> R. Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England* (London, 1865), I, 68.

<sup>102</sup> Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

is probably the myth of Galinthias, a fair girl transformed into a weasel in punishment for having fooled, on a noteworthy occasion, Hera and the immortal Olympians.<sup>102</sup> Equally ancient is the fable of Aesop's collection, in which a weasel, very much like the snake in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, falls in love with a handsome youth and by the grace of Aphrodite is transformed into a girl, so that she may marry him. At the marriage feast Aphrodite causes a mouse to run past the couch of the bride, whereupon the latter leaps down to pursue it, thus revealing her true nature.<sup>103</sup> Even more significant is the account of the Anonymus Wissenburgensis, in which Jupiter transforms the vixen into a woman. On seeing a dung-beetle crawl along near her couch, she leaps down to catch it and is retransformed into a vixen.<sup>104</sup> Nor is this version of the tale necessarily recent: Pindar seems to have known it, to judge from an allusion, and the comic poet Strattis, who lived about 400 B.C., knew the proverb *ou prepei galē krokōtos*, which clearly presupposes the existence of the fable.<sup>105</sup> Aelian (*de nat. anim.* XV. 11) has a story in which Hekate punishes a girl who, though fair and comely, was unfortunately not famous for strict morals, by turning her into a weasel. In modern Greek folklore the weasel is said to have been a bride and to have been changed into an animal, for which reason it envies all brides and tries to destroy them.<sup>106</sup> A similar metamorphosis story is current in southern Siberia, where an ermine transforms herself into a pretty girl to act as adviser to the hero of the story, after which she resumes her original shape.<sup>107</sup>

Lord Ragland, in a recent study,<sup>108</sup> justly observed that in parts of China the fox is an erotic symbol, whereas in Western Europe there is a good deal of nonerotic fox symbolism. He might have added that the erotic side exists there also, but that it is connected with the weasel, not with the fox. Suffice it to cite the common French sayings: *Si une fois une fille a fait l'amour, j'aimerais mieux garder un pré rempli de belettes*, and *mourir du mal de la furette*, i.e., *mourir du mal d'amour, d'un amour inassouvi*.<sup>109</sup>

The Russian scholar W. Klinger<sup>110</sup> was the first to point out that the weasel, when transformed into human shape, is invariably changed into a woman,

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40 f.

<sup>103</sup> Ed. Halm, No. 88; cf. Babrius, No. 32; Zenobius, II. 93; J. Hertel, *Zeitschrift d. Vereins f. Volkskunde*, XXII (1912), 244 ff.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Phaedri *fab.*, nov. 17, p. 94 M1; E. Rohde, *Kleine Schriften*, Tübingen-Leipzig (1901), II, 214.

<sup>105</sup> Pindar, *Ol.* XI [X]. 19 ff.: "Neither the tawny fox nor the loudly roaring lions can change their innate disposition."

<sup>106</sup> Sir Rennell Rodd, *The Customs and Lore of Modern Greece* (London, 1892), p. 169; O. Dähnhardt, *Natursagen*, III (Leipzig-Berlin, 1910), p. 459; Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>107</sup> W. Radloff, *Proben der Volksliteratur des türkischen Stämme Südsibiriens* (St. Petersburg, 1866-1886), II, 201 ff.

<sup>108</sup> *Folk-Lore*, XLVI (1935), p. 338.

<sup>109</sup> E. Rolland, *Faune populaire de la France* (Paris, 1877-1915), VII, 147.

<sup>110</sup> *Zhivotnoe v anticnom i sovremennom sueverii* (*Izvestia of Kiev University*, 1912); cf. Duncan, p. 44.

never into a man. We have seen above that this is largely, though not entirely, true of the fox in Far Eastern folklore. Klinger drew the further conclusion that the weasel was a soul animal, the soul being generally represented in female form. Klinger's conclusion is fully confirmed by a vast amount of evidence collected independently and partly after the publication of his work.<sup>111</sup> Nor is this belief limited to Europe: the ancient Mexicans held that the souls of the illustrious dead lived on in the shape of beautiful singing birds, while those of mere plebeians went into weasels.<sup>112</sup>

This does not exhaust the striking similarity between the Far Eastern fox and the European weasel superstitions. We have seen above that foxes occasionally drive to suicide the person they plague. Now it is interesting to note that Heracleides Ponticus tells a story of how a weasel punished one Polemarchus by driving him to destroy himself.<sup>113</sup> As F. Liebrecht<sup>114</sup> pointed out, the idea underlying this tale is the supposition that the souls of the victims betrayed by Polemarchus returned in the shape of weasels, thus revenging themselves on the wrongdoer after their death.

The fox, in current Chinese and Japanese beliefs, must not be insulted in any way, and this also holds true for the weasel in Europe. A Swiss story from the canton of Uri relates how a man barely escaped being killed by weasels, whose wrath he had provoked by obscene language.<sup>115</sup>

Like the fox in China and Japan, the weasel in Europe is usually an animal of ill omen;<sup>116</sup> only occasionally—again like the fox in the Far East—is it considered a good omen.<sup>117</sup> In the Far East the fox is a "fire animal" and feared as such; in Europe (as in Japan<sup>118</sup>) the same superstition is attached to the weasel.<sup>119</sup> Again, it is as bad to kill a weasel in Europe as it is to kill a fox in China or Japan: it means bad luck to come.<sup>120</sup> It is worth adding that in Europe witches preferably assume the shape of weasels when setting out on their evil errands, a belief calculated to increase the superstitious fear inspired by the animal.<sup>121</sup>

We have seen above that the Chinese do not like to pronounce the name of the fox. Much the same thing holds true for the weasel in Europe. Thus

<sup>111</sup> O. Tobler, *Die Epiphanie der Seele in deutscher Volkssage* (Kiel, 1911), p. 19; Schott, *op. cit.*, pp. 21 f.

<sup>112</sup> Duncan, p. 53.

<sup>113</sup> Cap. 29: "Polemarchus, taking a false oath, escaped from the expedition of the Corinthians. And they tell the story that, when he was sleeping by night, the weasels (cats?) bit him and finally he got up in distress."

<sup>114</sup> *Zur Volkskunde* (Heilbronn, 1879), p. 12.

<sup>115</sup> J. Müller, *Schweizerisches Archiv f. Volkskunde*, XVI (1912), 135.

<sup>116</sup> Scheffelowitz, *Bauernglaube*, p. 14; Schott, pp. 13 f.; Duncan, pp. 54 ff.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>118</sup> Scheffelowitz, *Zeitschrift d. Vereins f. Volkskunde*, XXIII (1913), p. 385.

<sup>119</sup> H. v. Wlislöcki, *Aus dem inneren Leben der Zigeuner* (Berlin, 1892), p. 167.

<sup>120</sup> Duncan, p. 58; Th. Vernaleken, *Alpensagen* (Wien, 1858), p. 132, No. 108.

<sup>121</sup> Schott, pp. 15 f.

the modern Greeks avoid pronouncing the word *nymphitza* "weasel."<sup>122</sup> In the Upper Palatinate one must not call the animal by its name but must refer to it as "schöns Dingel, behüts Gott."<sup>123</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam points out that in Britain, at the starting of the hunt, it was an ill omen even to mention the name of the weasel.<sup>124</sup> The vast majority of European weasel names are clearly "taboo names," which have their origin in the same mysterious fear.<sup>125</sup>

If in the Far East the fox plays the part of the hobgoblin, in many regions of Europe the weasel is considered a house spirit and is given food and milk by way of an "offering."<sup>126</sup> If the fox enjoys a regular cult in China, Manchuria, and Japan, so did the weasel at Thebes—the scene, incidentally, of the exploit of Galinthias and her metamorphosis.<sup>127</sup> Among the Huzules in the Carpathian Mountains the weasel has a special holiday, which falls on the days of St. Matthew or St. Catherine; its purpose is to propitiate the animal, so that it may spare the chicken yards.<sup>128</sup>

Lastly, the part played by the weasel in European popular medicine is altogether commensurate with that played by the fox in the popular medicine of the Far East.<sup>129</sup>

With the help of the material collected in the foregoing pages it should be possible and even easy to penetrate to the root of these beliefs and superstitions.

First of all, we are led to inquire into the common features of fox, snake, and weasel. The answer is clear: all three are typically chthonian animals living in underground holes and caverns. In regard to the snake, this fact has long since been recognized as the reason underlying the widespread belief that the souls of the dead go into snakes.<sup>130</sup> For the weasel, Klinger correctly remarked: "The evil significance of the weasel in later superstition is in all likelihood to be deduced from this, that at first men saw in it a chthonian demon resident in the earth."<sup>131</sup> Duncan holds much the same view: "The weasel, from its habit of burrowing in the ground, would early be associated with the world of the dead, hence would readily be regarded as a soul animal."<sup>132</sup> Now it is noteworthy that in China the ordinary home of the fox is a tomb, usually

<sup>122</sup> G. F. Abbott, *Macedonian Folk-lore* (Cambridge, 1903), p. 108.

<sup>123</sup> A. Wuttke, *Der deutsche Volksaberglaube der Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1900), p. 126.

<sup>124</sup> Duncan, p. 61.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. the references given in n. 98; P. H. Böhringer, *Das Wiesel* (Zürich, 1935), pp. 49 ff., 79 ff.; G. Flechia, *Archivio glottologico italiano*, II (1876), 46 ff.; G. Rohlf, *Archiv f.d. Studium d. neueren Spr. u. Lit.*, CLX (1931), 243 ff.; Riegler, *Wörter und Sachen*, IV (1912), 175 f.

<sup>126</sup> E. H. Meyer, *Mythologie der Germanen* (Strassburg, 1903), p. 80; Schott, pp. 52 f.

<sup>127</sup> Clem. Alex. *protr.* II. 39, p. 34 Po; cf. Böhringer, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>128</sup> Riegler, *Wörter und Sachen*, II, 189 f.

<sup>129</sup> Pliny, *N.H.* XXX. 27; Wuttke, *op. cit.*, p. 126; E. Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (London, 1926), II, 323.

<sup>130</sup> Tobler, *op. cit.*, p. 20; Thompson, *Motif-Index*, D 191; L. Lévy-Bruhl, *The "Soul" of the Primitive* (London, 1928), pp. 292 ff.

<sup>131</sup> Duncan, p. 43.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

one of considerable antiquity.<sup>133</sup> At all events, fox and badger are known to make their holes in a mound or hillock; they are typically chthonian animals. It is worth adding, perhaps, that both fox and weasel are nocturnal animals, a fact calculated to add to the "uncanniness" of their character.

The peculiar role of the fox as a hobgoblin appears to have an analogue in European weasel superstitions. It must be derived from the animal's character as a soul animal: the European hobgoblins, from Spain to Norway, are generally admitted to be the spirits of the dead, having frequently the same functions as the Roman *Lares*, except that the dominant Christian religion has probably stressed unduly the mischievous side of their being. The chief difference seems to be that the Chinese and Japanese fox is not a friendly spirit but the spirit of a stranger and an enemy, one who died with a grudge against the family he subsequently haunts.

One feature of the Far Eastern fox lore would seem to require an explanation not easy to derive from the chthonian character of the animal: the ability of the fox to produce fire by striking the ground with its tail.<sup>134</sup> This superstition has its basis in the red color of the animal, especially of its tail. Fire-bearing and fire-producing animals the world over are characterized by the red color of their fur (or in birds, the color of their feathers), by red spots on their heads and bodies, and the like. What is even more interesting is that the fox is credited by the Jicarilla Indians of northern New Mexico with having caught with his tail the fire in the possession of the fireflies and with having brought it to earth for the benefit of man.<sup>135</sup> It is probably in the same capacity of a fire-bearing animal that the fox is chosen by Samson (Judges XV: 4) to destroy the fields, vineyards, and olive groves of the Philistines. It is a peculiar type of associative thinking which is responsible for these beliefs and which, because of its very universality, goes far to prove the essential identity of the human mind.

This leads us to a concluding observation. Several years ago, in a study published under the auspices of the Faculté de Lettres de Bordeaux, the writer drew attention to a striking Japanese parallel of the French Melusina tale,<sup>136</sup> observing that both go back to a common basis deeply rooted in human nature. In most of these tales the fairy wife is a supernatural being credited with all the perfections which poor humanity has always bestowed upon the products of their own fancy. Only in a few of the many variants is this fairy wife an animal or shows, like the French Melusina, traces of a former animal form. At the same time there can be no reasonable doubt that this animal form was

<sup>133</sup> Watters, p. 47.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>135</sup> F. Russell, *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, XI (1898), 261 f.; cf. Sir James G. Frazer, *Myths of the Origin of Fire* (London, 1930), pp. 140 ff.

<sup>136</sup> *Bulletin hispanique*, XXXV (1933), 107 ff.



once far more common than it is in the stories that have come down to us. Thus in certain Indian stories the *naga* wife becomes merely an "evil spirit," and the snake in the episode of the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* is referred to as a Lamia. In many of the Far Eastern fox stories the animal nature of the wife has also fallen far into the background, the "fox elf" taking the place of the primitive fox. In other words, we are here in the presence of much the same process observable in the history of religions: the animal-shaped gods and goddesses gradually slough off their animal skins and become human; the European Thunderbird (the eagle) becomes the Olympian Zeus; the fiery African horse (the ancestor of the Arabian horse) develops into the "earth-shaking" Poseidon, and the nocturnal owl, haunting the ruins of the Acropolis, turns up as Pallas Athena, the Athenian Virgin, whose Homeric epithet *glaukopis*, alone betrays her rather un-Olympian past.